

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 NEA-14 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03

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SS-20 USIA-15 TRSE-00 SAJ-01 OMB-01 EB-11 COME-00

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FM AMEMBASSY BONN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2431

INFO AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY PARIS

USMISSION BERLIN

USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS

AMCONSUL BREMEN

AMCONSUL DUSSELDORF

AMCONSUL FRANKFURT

AMCONSUL HAMBURG

AMCONSUL MUNICH

AMCONSUL STUTTGART

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BONN 07532

JIDDA, DAMASCUS, TEL AVIV, JERUSALEM FOR THE SECRETARY

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, GW

SUBJECT: PORTRAIT OF HELMUT SCHMIDT

1. SUMMARY: THE PROSPECTIVE NEW GERMAN CHANCELLOR,
HELMUT SCHMIDT, IS A HIGHLY INTELLIGENT AND ARTICULATE
POLITICIAN WHO, IF HE CAN OVERCOME CERTAIN TEMPERAMEN-
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TAL AND PHYSICAL PROBLEMS, COULD DO MUCH TO REVITALIZE

HIS PARTY AND PROVIDE THE KIND OF DYNAMIC LEADERSHIP FOR HIS COUNTRY OF WHICH BRANDT WAS INCAPABLE. THE PORTRAIT WHICH FOLLOWS IS BASED ON MY MANY YEARS OF PERSONAL ACQUAINTANCE WITH SCHMIDT, FREQUENT CONVERSATIONS WITH HIM AND THE ASSESSMENT OF OBSERVERS WHO HAVE BEEN CLOSE TO HIM IN THE PAST. END SUMMARY

2. BORN IN 1918 AND A NORTH GERMAN TO THE CORE, HELMUT SCHMIDT WILL TAKE OVER THE CHANCELLORSHIP OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY ON MAY 16 UNDER CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH HE COULD NOT HAVE ANTICIPATED BUT WHICH FOUND HIM READY TO MOVE WHEN IT QUICKLY BECAME EVIDENT THAT, DESPITE THE RESERVATIONS OF BOTH BRANDT AND SPD MAJORITY LEADER WEHNER, HE WAS THE ONLY POSSIBLE CANDIDATE WITH THE ASSURED SUPPORT OF BOTH THE SPD AND THE FDP. THERE HAS BEEN NO DOUBT IN THE PAST ABOUT HIS AMBITION TO BECOME CHANCELLOR, ALTHOUGH THERE HAVE BEEN TIMES WHEN HE HIMSELF FELT THAT THE TIDE WAS RUNNING OUT ON HIM, AND THAT HIS ENEMIES WITHIN THE PARTY WOULD EFFECTIVELY BE ABLE TO BLOCK HIS MOVE TO THE TOP.

3. NO ONE HAS EVER DISPUTED SCHMIDT'S INTELLIGENCE AND ARTICULATENESS. AS A YOUNG MEMBER OF THE BUNDESTAG IN 1953, HE ACQUIRED THE SOBRIQUET OF "SCHMIDT SCHNAUZE" (SCHMIDT BIG-MOUTH), AND HE WAS NEVER AT A LOSS FOR A HARSH WORD OR INSULT WHEN HIS LOW TOLERANCE FOR WHAT HE CONSIDERED STUPIDITY WAS EXCEEDED. OVER THE YEARS, HE HAS MADE A DELIBERATE EFFORT TO CONTROL HIS LANGUAGE, BUT IF AROUSED HE CAN STILL DISH OUT ABUSE WITH GREAT GUSTO. WITH EARLY TRAINING IN ECONOMICS, HE IS A QUICK LEARNER, AND AFTER A FEW MONTHS AS FINANCE MINISTER COULD SPOUT THE JARGON AND DEBATE THE FINE POINTS OF INTERNATIONAL FINANCE WITH THE BEST OF HIS CONFRERES. DURING HIS EARLIER PERIOD AS DEFENSE MINISTER, HE SHOWED A KEEN INTEREST IN THE STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS OF NUCLEAR WEAPONRY AND WAS ABLE TO DISCUSS THE BASIC CONCEPTS IN THIS AREA, DEVELOPED MAINLY IN THE U.S., WITH MORE SOPHISTICATION THAN ALL BUT A FEW EUROPEANS.

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4. SCHMIDT HAS NOT ENJOYED PARTICULARLY GOOD HEALTH IN RECENT YEARS. HE SUFFERS FROM A CHRONIC HYPERTHYROID CONDITION WHICH IS PRESENTLY UNDER CONTROL BUT WHICH, IN THE PAST, HAS FROM TIME TO TIME BROUGHT PERIODS OF GREAT IRRITABILITY AND NERVOUS TENSION, COMPOUNDED BY HIS INTENSIVE WORK HABITS. LESS THAN TWO YEARS AGO, HE FEARED HE WAS SUFFERING FROM THYROID CANCER, BUT THIS TURNED OUT NOT TO BE THE CASE.

WHETHER THE HEALTH FACTOR WILL PROVE IMPORTANT AS HE IS
SUBJECTED TO THE STRAINS OF THE CHANCELLORSHIP REMAINS
TO BE SEEN, BUT THIS IS CERTAINLY A CONTINUING POSSI-
BILITY.

5. IN HIS WORK HABITS, SCHMIDT TENDS TO DRIVE HIMSELF
VERY HARD. HE GENERALLY AVOIDS GETTING CAUGHT UP IN
THE BONN SOCIAL SCENE, BUT HAS MADE HIMSELF AVAILABLE
FOR CONTACTS WITH A FEW DIPLOMATS AS WELL AS A WIDE
RANGE OF POLITICIANS. ACCORDING TO FORMER AND PRESENT
CO-WORKERS IN BOTH THE DEFENSE AND FINANCE MINISTRIES,
HE IS INCISIVE, MAKES DECISIONS QUICKLY AND EXPECTS A

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HIGH STANDARD OF PERFORMANCE. ONCE HE IS PERSUADED OF AN OFFICIAL'S ABILITY , HE WILL DELEGATE CONSIDERABLE AUTHORITY TO HIM (AS, FOR EXAMPLE, TO STATE SECRETARY POEHL IN THE FINANCE MINISTRY) AND RELY ON HIM FOR INFORMATION ON CRUCIAL ISSUES.

6. MORE THAN MANY GERMAN OFFICIALS, SCHMIDT IS ESSENTIALLY PRAGMATIC IN HIS APPROACH BOTH TO THE SOLUTION OF PROBLEMS AND IN HIS ELABORATION OF THE
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CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS WITHIN WHICH HE OPERATES. AS A YOUNG MAN, HE WAS IDENTIFIED WITH THE LEFT WING OF HIS PARTY, BUT HE IS NOW ON MOST ISSUES IN THE CENTER OR ON THE RIGHT, RETAINING AT THE SAME TIME MAXIMUM TACTICAL FLEXIBILITY. IT WOULD BE HARD TO FIND ANY STRONG IDEOLOGICAL STRAIN IN HIS APPROACH TO EASTERN OR WESTERN EUROPE. HE HAS ACCEPTED THE MAIN LINES OF POLICY DEVELOPED UNDER THE BRANDT GOVERNMENT, BUT HAS LAID PRIMARY STRESS ON GERMAN INTERESTS. HE HAS, FOR EXAMPLE, TAKEN A VERY HARD LINE ON EXTENSIONS OF CREDIT TO EASTERN EUROPE WHICH PROBABLY WENT BEYOND THE AUTOMATIC NEGATIVE REFLEXES OF A MINISTER OF FINANCE. HE IS A STRONG BELIEVER IN THE UTILITY OF NATO AND THE NECESSITY OF A CONTINUING EFFECTIVE WESTERN DEFENSE, AND HAS NOT ENGAGED IN PENNY-PINCHING VIS-A-VIS HIS COLLEAGUE LEBER. HIS VIEWS TOWARD EUROPEAN UNITY REMAIN SOMEWHAT AMBIGUOUS. CERTAINLY, HE IS NOT A EUROPEANIST IN THE MONNET SENSE, AND THERE WAS A TIME BEFORE BRITISH ENTRY INTO THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY WHEN HIS ORIENTATION WAS ADMITTEDLY MORE TOWARDS A LARGER EUROPE INCLUDING THE NORTHERN COUNTRIES THAN TOWARDS THE COMMUNITY OF SIX. HE DID, HOWEVER, SUPPORT THE GOAL OF MONETARY UNION BY 1980, ALTHOUGH HE HAS NOW COME TO ACCEPT THAT THE DIVISIVE TENDENCIES WITHIN THE COMMUNITY STIMULATED BY RECENT OIL PRICE INCREASES MAKE THIS UNREALISTIC.

7. ALTHOUGH TAKING SOME PRIDE IN THE OVERRIDING REALITY OF THE FRG'S ECONOMIC AND EXPORT BOOM, HE HAS NOT AT ALL BEEN HAPPY ABOUT WHAT HE CONSIDERS A BASIC DISTORTION INHERENT IN THAT BOOM. HE HAS ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS COMPLAINED TO ME ABOUT THE STUPIDITY OF A SYSTEM WHICH REQUIRES THE GERMANS TO BRING IN MORE AND MORE FOREIGN WORKERS TO PRODUCE PRODUCTS

FOR SALE ABROAD TO BALANCE OUT THE REMISSIONS OF MONEY BY THESE WORKERS BACK TO THEIR COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN, AND WHICH RESULTS IN A SUBSTANTIAL PORTION OF THE ANNUAL INCREMENT TO GERMAN GNP NOT BEING CONSUMED BY THE GERMAN PUBLIC IN THE FORM OF GOODS BUT EXPORTED. HE HAS NOT, HOWEVER, BEEN ABLE TO SUGGEST ANY SPECIFIC REMEDY FOR THIS PHENOMENON, AND HE WOULD CERTAINLY BE CONFIDENTIAL

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RELUCTANT TO TAKE ANY CONCRETE ACTION SMACKING OF NEO-MERCANTILISM.

8. AS CHANCELLOR, HE WILL PROBABLY MOVE SLOWLY AGAINST THE JUSOS RATHER THAN PRECIPITATE A MAJOR SHOWDOWN AT AN EARLY STAGE. ONCE HE IS CONVINCED, HOWEVER, THAT DRASTIC ACTION IS BOTH NECESSARY AND PRACTICABLE IN TERMS OF PARTY REALITIES, HE WILL BE CAPABLE OF MOVING RUTHLESSLY. IN THIS, AS IN OTHER RESPECTS, THE QUALITY WHICH HE HAS CONSISTENTLY DEMONSTRATED OF BEING ABLE TO TEMPER HIS ACTIONS IN ACCORD WITH THE TACTICAL NEEDS OF THE MOMENT WILL DOMINATE.

9. IN HIS DEALINGS WITH US, WE CAN EXPECT SCHMIDT TO BE A HARD BUT FAIR NEGOTIATOR. HE WILL EXPECT TO BE TREATED AS AN EQUAL IN EVERY RESPECT, AND WILL NOT BE ABOVE LECTURING US ON OCCASION. ONCE HE HAS MADE A COMMITMENT, HOWEVER, HE WILL BE ABLE TO DEAL ENERGETICALLY WITH THE VARIOUS GERMAN MINISTRIES WHICH HAVE TO BE BROUGHT IN LINE. WHETHER HE CAN PROVIDE THE SUSTAINED AND DYNAMIC LEADERSHIP WHICH COULD MAKE A MAJOR CONTRIBUTION TO THE ORDERING OF EUROPE'S CURRENT PROBLEMS AND PROVIDE NEW IMPULSES FOR THE ATLANTIC RELATIONSHIP IS ANOTHER QUESTION THE ANSWER TO WHICH, AT THIS TIME OF TROUBLES, WILL BE OF MORE THAN CONVENTIONAL HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE.
HILLENBRAND

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